





# **Project Skills**

## **High School Work Experience Program Manual**



**Division of Rehabilitation Services  
&  
Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Revised August 2017

# Welcome to Project Skills

Thanks for taking the time to explore the Project Skills program and how it applies to you, whether you are an educator, a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor, a student, a parent, or an employer. Project Skills is a paid work experience program that ties together the support and efforts of many different people. The program provides students with opportunities to get real career experiences within the world of work. Through the program, students are able to explore vocational interests, practice the skills required to become a good employee, and develop a structure to lean on as they venture into the world after high school.

Project Skills is funded through the Department of Human Services: Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), and local school districts. DRS and SBVI are referred to as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and is a program that provides individualized vocational rehabilitation and supportive services to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to reach their employment goals. For the purposes of this manual, these programs will be referred to as VR.

Here is a quick overview of how the Project Skills program works. The student, along with school staff begin the process by connecting with a VR counselor and applying for VR services. When the student is determined eligible for services, the VR counselor will work with the student and the school staff to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that will include a work experience. Once the plan is in place, the school staff (or a provider) will assist the student in identifying and obtaining a job in the community. This will include identifying and providing necessary supports for the student to be successful during the work experience. The student is paid through the VR program using federal training dollars at the current minimum wage. The student may work up to 250 hours per school year.

The Project Skills manual has been developed with the awareness that each of us plays a unique role in supporting our students participating in Project Skills. The different sections are written through the lens of each of these roles. Feel free to check out all the sections, but make sure to read through the section that relates to YOUR role. It is our hope that the manual can serve as a go-to resource to answer your questions and help you coordinate activities from start to finish. As wonderful a document as this manual might be, each situation may have unique aspects that cannot possibly all be explained and covered here. In those situations, let your VR counselor or regional transition liaison become your resource.

## Time Form

| Minutes From: | To: | Tenths of Hour |
|---------------|-----|----------------|
| 0             | 5   | 0              |
| 6             | 11  | .1             |
| 12            | 17  | .2             |
| 18            | 23  | .3             |
| 24            | 29  | .4             |
| 30            | 35  | .5             |
| 36            | 41  | .6             |
| 42            | 47  | .7             |
| 48            | 53  | .8             |
| 54            | 59  | .9             |

- Completing your time card and time worked is an important part of every job.
- Make sure you take the time to complete your time card accurately and so others can read it.
- Often your time worked is in full hour units. However your time can be entered in the tenths of an hour. Pay close attention to the minutes chart provided on the time card.
- Lunch time is not paid time so make sure your time card does not include this time.
- Document your time on the day you worked. Don't wait until the end of the week or pay period.
- On the employee line, print your first and last name so it is easy to read.
- Always sign your time card and have your job supervisor sign your time card also.
- Follow the Payroll Schedule and turn your time card in by the due date in order to get paid on time.
- Ask for assistance from your teacher, job coach or employer in completing the time card.
- Follow these guidelines to assure you get paid correctly and on time.

## Project Skills Time Sheet

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay Period Start Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Pay Period End Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Hours Worked This Pay Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Balance of Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Employer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** Time Card is due to the VR Counselor 3 days after the Pay Period End Date

## ► Roles and Responsibilities:

- You will be approached by the school staff or an employment specialist (job coach) regarding possible work experience opportunities for a student.
- Similar to any other job applicant, you may have the student fill out an application and interview the student for possible work experience options.
- Collaborate with school staff to determine the duties and expectations you will have for the student.
- Help determine the work schedule.
- Provide adequate general liability and automobile liability insurance (if applicable). VR is responsible for the workers' compensation insurance.
- Provide orientation and training for the student. School staff or a job coach/employment specialist may accompany the student to assist in the training and adjustment to the employment setting.
- Assist with and sign off on the student's time card
- Provide feedback on the students' employment strengths and needs.
- Promote good work habits through an authentic work experience, where a participant will learn the benefits of doing a good job and the consequences of not.
- Work with school staff or a job coach/employment specialist to help the student learn the job and identify natural supports on the job.

## ► To Report a First Injury Report (Workers' Compensation):

- Report the injury immediately by contacting the school representative or VR Counselor
- A "First Report of Injury Report" will need to be completed within the first three days following the occurrence of the injury

The employer is responsible for liability insurance the same as for any other employee.

# Project Skills Technical Assistance Contacts

## Vocational Rehabilitation Office Contacts



**Website:** <http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/default.aspx>

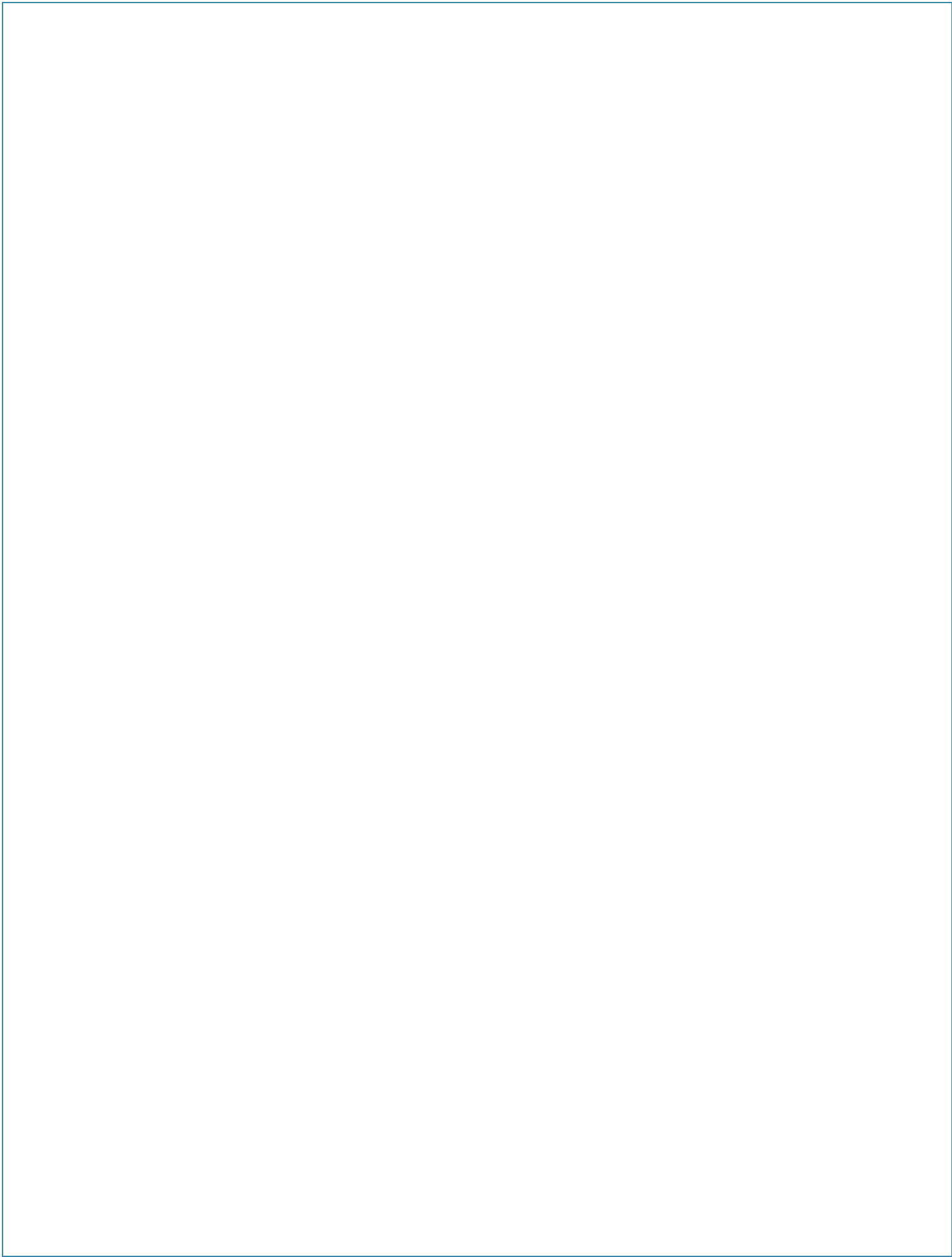
|                   |                              |                    |                              |                    |                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Aberdeen</b>   | 605-626-2398<br>800-439-3417 | <b>Brookings</b>   | 605-688-4280<br>800-382-2176 | <b>Chamberlain</b> | 605-734-4555<br>800-265-9677 |
| <b>Huron</b>      | 605-353-7130<br>800-382-2176 | <b>Mitchell</b>    | 605-995-8072<br>800-265-9677 | <b>Pierre</b>      | 605-773-3318<br>877-873-8500 |
| <b>Rapid City</b> | 605-394-2261<br>800-439-8861 | <b>Sioux Falls</b> | 605-367-5330<br>800-265-9679 | <b>Spearfish</b>   | 605-642-6817<br>800-439-8861 |
| <b>Watertown</b>  | 605-882-5150<br>866-261-9261 | <b>Yankton</b>     | 605-668-3050<br>800-265-9677 |                    |                              |



## Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) Contacts

**Website:** <http://www.tslp.org>

|                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Coordinator</b>          | 800-224-5336 ext. 1518    |
| <b>Central Region</b>       | Direct Line: 605-494-3618 |
| <b>Western Region</b>       | 605-347-4467              |
| <b>North Central Region</b> | 605-626-2398              |
| <b>South Eastern Region</b> | 605-367-5330              |
| <b>South Central Region</b> | 605-494-3612              |



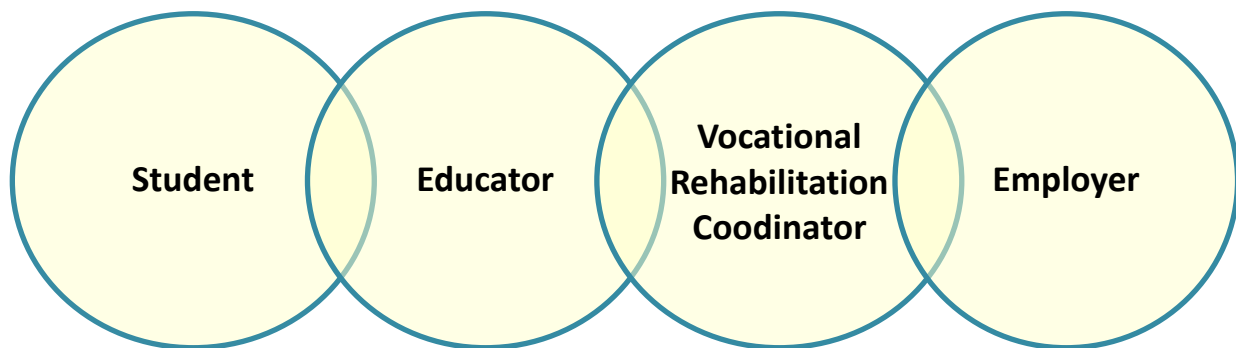
# Employer Information

The state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs under the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) work collaboratively with the school(s) in your community to provide career exploration and employment experiences for students with disabilities. VR provides assistance with funding the hourly wages, workers' compensation, and FICA while the school provides assistance to students and businesses with job development, and on-the-job supports during the duration of the work experience. The employer's role is to provide a meaningful work experience for students to help them learn and obtain employment knowledge and learn new skills.

We appreciate your interest in the Project Skills program and thank you for giving students this opportunity!

## ► **Top Benefits to an Employer:**

- Access to an untapped labor pool.
- Potential of finding good employees for your business.
- Be able to provide training and work experience for students within your community.
- Gain knowledge about services provided to individuals with disabilities.





## ► Determine needs for referral to Benefits counseling:

If a student and/or family member receives Social Security (SSA) disability benefits, then make a referral to a benefits specialist to address any concerns the family may have. A benefits specialist is someone who has been trained specifically to help individuals receiving social security disability benefits understand how working impacts benefits. It's important that a family contact their local SSA office and inform them that their son or daughter is participating in Project Skills, a paid school work experience. *Make sure that SSA knows that the wages are from a school work experience and are part of their Individual Education Plan (IEP).*

## ► What happens if the student is injured on the job?

VR provides worker's compensation insurance on all participants. If the student is injured on the job, tell the employer, school staff, and VR counselor. A "South Dakota Employer's First Report of Injury" form must be completed and submitted within three days from the date of injury. These forms are available from the VR counselor or go to website at <http://dhs.sd.gov/drs/projectskills/default.aspx>.

All medical bills will be submitted to the VR counselor and they can forward them to the insurance company.

**Note:** Employers are required to have general liability insurance. This insurance covers general accidents that may occur on the employer's property.

### Documents for Project Skills:

Secure and process Project Skills forms with assistance from Support Staff:

- Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)
- Project Skills Work Agreement plan
- W-4 \*
- Non-permanent employment form \*
- Copy of social security card \*
- Select service form for students \*
- Employment Eligibility Form I-9 \*
- Employee Direct Deposit form \*
- Project Skills Monthly reports
- Project Skills Assurance of Match

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**Project Skills information and forms are located at:**

<http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/servicesandprograms.aspx>

# Student/Parent Information



- Have you ever thought about getting a job?
- Why would someone go out and get a job?
- How would a person go about it?

Hopefully the following information will help you with these and other questions you may have when it comes to going to work and getting connected with Project Skills.

## Top Reasons To Get a Job While in School:

- Money in your pocket!
- Gain experience – learn what it's like to be an employee
- Start to develop a work history and references for your resume
- Independence – take control of your future
- A chance to explore what you might like for a career
- Stay busy and out of trouble 😊
- Build confidence
- Chance to practice budgeting
- Want a Job?

## PROJECT SKILLS

### Get Connected...Find Out if You're Eligible



#### Are you----

- A Student on an IEP?
- At Least 16 years old?
- Looking for a job?

If so, get in contact with your local VR office and talk to a VR counselor to apply for VR services (You can apply prior to age 16.) Your family and teacher can help you.

To be eligible for VR services, you must have a documented disability that affects your ability to work. Your VR counselor will make the decision on your eligibility. Once you are made eligible, you are on your way!

▶ **The following conditions must be met before VR will fund these job coaching services:**

- The initial 125 hours per student of job coaching provided by the school must be documented in the service reports that are provided to the VR counselor,
- Countable job coaching services is supervising and training the student at the job site,
- The additional Project Skills services and funding of job coaching services must be pre-approved, included in the Individual Plan for Employment and authorized by the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, and
- If approved, Vocational Rehabilitation will purchase the job coaching services from the school district or an approved provider.

▶ **VR Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Meet with students to complete application process.
- Obtain documentation to determine eligibility such as IEP, school transcripts, psychological evaluations, etc. (This may also include information from outside the school, such as medical information and counseling notes.).
- Determine eligibility within the appropriate timeframe (60 days).
- Verify that the school district has a Project Skills contract with VR.
- Provide Project Skills manual with forms to the school and student.
- Meet with student to develop Individual Plan for Employment.
- Attend annual IEP and other team meetings.
- Review SD MyLife assessments if available.
- Participate in pre-employment transition activities with students.
- Be prepared to provide technical assistance on job development, job coaching, monitoring and completing forms when asked.
- Collaborate with schools to identify job opportunities.
- Enroll student on the state payroll system by sending applicable employment forms to Bureau of Human Resources (refer to "\*" under Documents for Project Skills).
- Collaborate with support staff to generate an authorization for work experience wage and benefits as outlined in IPE.
- Coordinate with support staff to process timecards for payment.
- Collect and review monthly reports from the school to assess student work experience.
- Assist in identification of the need for accommodations.
- Meet with student to discuss long-term goals.
- Collaboration with regional Transition Liaison staff supporting implementation of Project Skills.

# Vocational Rehabilitation Information

It is the goal of the VR programs (DRS/SBVI), to provide individualized vocational rehabilitation and supportive services to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to get and keep jobs compatible with their skills and abilities. Project Skills has many benefits and is a stepping-stone in this process. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors have the unique opportunity to provide high school students with disabilities this paid work experience option. Students with disabilities have historically left high school with no paid work experience to put on their resume. Project Skills give the students a chance to change that, thus increasing their employment and training opportunities upon leaving high school.

Participating in Project Skills has many benefits, for the employer, the student, VR, and the school. It is a good assessment tool to determine a student's vocational abilities, interests and needs. Project Skills is very beneficial for the rehabilitation process as it gives the counselor an opportunity to get to know the student well, which leads to a more effective transition and long term planning and service provision. Through Project Skills, VR counselors are also able to enhance effective working relationships with school staff and become an important part of the student's transition team.

## ► Funding:

Project Skills is funded through a joint effort between VR and the school. VR provides for the student wages, FICA and worker's compensation and in some cases, uniforms, boots, gloves, transportation or other services that may be needed for the student to work. Economic need is not required for the Project Skills wages or workers compensation but would be needed for purchase such as uniforms, boots, gloves, and transportation. Items needed that are disability related do not need to meet economic need.

The school district is responsible for providing matching funds for the wages paid through VR. The match can be met through job development, job coaching and monitoring on the job. A teacher, paraprofessional or other school staff can provide these employment services/supports. Schools may contract with an approved VR provider.

To promote Project Skills for students with the most significant disabilities; Vocational Rehabilitation can fund the job coaching services after the School District has provided and documented the initial 125 hours of job coaching for a student during a school year.

The initial 125 hours of job coaching is based on each individual student and not combined hours of multiple students.

## **To Participate in Project Skills, a student must:**

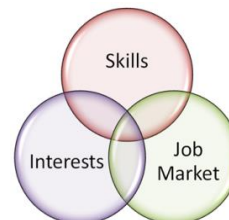
- Be eligible for VR services (can be determined prior to age 16)
- Be at least 16 years of age
- Have an interest in working
- Be enrolled in a certified secondary education program and be on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Be in a school district that has a current Project Skills contract with Department of Human Services (DHS). A contract is arranged between the school and the VR state office.



## Exploration and Planning

This part is all about you! Speak up and work with your IEP team to figure out what working looks like for you. You'll want to think about what jobs interest you and how to use your skills so you can be the best employee you can be.

Your IEP meetings with the school are fantastic opportunities to talk about and plan for your future and work. Once you've let your team know you're interested in Project Skills, the ball can get rolling to help you reach your goals!



Having trouble figuring out what your interests are? There are activities your teacher and your VR counselor can do with your help. These activities may include completing interest inventories and/or ability assessments, providing job shadowing experiences, and using SD MyLife (a career exploration program available to all students in South Dakota), to name just a few. Make sure to ask questions if you don't understand what your teacher or VR counselor is talking about!

Before you start Project Skills, activities that may help you prepare to enter the workplace may include:

- Filling out a sample job application,
- Developing a resume,
- Interviewing with an employer, and
- Locating documents such as Social Security Card, driver's license or ID card, or, if applicable, selective service card.



### Your Responsibilities

As a growing young adult eager to get to work, you have some responsibilities while participating in the Project Skills program. It is important to attend scheduled meetings with your VR counselor. Communicate with your job coach, teachers and employer on successes and concerns you encounter during your work experience.

During the work experience, demonstrate qualities that make a good employee. Learn them and practice them often!

- Be dependable
- Be on time
- Be honest
- Dress appropriately
- Be responsible
- Follow directions
- Handle constructive criticism tactfully
- Get along with co-workers and supervisors
- Learn what is expected of you

- Ask when you don't understand something
- Stay busy and take initiative
- Go to work when scheduled
- Sign and turn your time cards in on time
- Keep a positive attitude
- Communicate with employer about your work schedule, especially when you don't think you'll make it to work on time or at all.

## How Are Others Helping You

So while you are planning and preparing for a work experience, what is everyone else doing to assist you?

### What's your school doing?

The staff at the school plays a major role in the Project Skills program by helping you to get connected with a VR counselor and an employer in the community that will be interested in providing you a work experience. School staff will also support you in learning how to be a good employee and the necessary skills of the job. This support is often referred to as job coaching and provided as needed to support you while on the job. Once you have learned your new job duties and become comfortable on the job, the school staff will continue to monitor your progress by checking in with you and your employer to help you adjust to any changes made at the worksite.

The School staff will work with you, the VR counselor and your employer to fill out all the necessary paperwork that needs to be completed in order for you to participate in Project Skills. In addition to Project Skills, the school staff can also assist you with career planning through the SD MyLife program (<http://sdmylife.com/>) and teach you other important job-related skills.



### How about your employer?

Employers will be excited to have you work for them! They are to provide you a “real life” job experience. They will provide you guidance and supervision, just like any of their other employees. They will help train you, provide feedback on your performance, communicate with school staff, and give you tips on how to be a positive, productive employee. If you need accommodations in the work place, your employer can be part of that planning process as well.

## Making the Most from The Project Skills Work Experience

- Work experience programs provide a wealth of information about a student's interests, strengths, and abilities while exploring possible career paths.
- An important aspect of supporting youth during work experiences is providing feedback on their performance and growth.
- Providing opportunities for assessing abilities and strengths in a "real-life" work setting is an important aspect of making the most of the student's Project Skills program.
- The student's strengths and needs identified from the worksite should be incorporated into the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFPS) page of the IEP. This will assist in the development of an appropriate and effective transition plan, including post-school goals and transition services/activities.
- Utilizing various work place assessments of the student will help the IEP team identify specific vocational strengths and needs of the student. The team can then decide how best to address those needs; i.e. annual goals, transition services, etc.
- Various examples of work site assessment tools to utilize can be found at [www.tslp.org](http://www.tslp.org).
- Applying what the student has learned through their Project Skills experience(s) should be discussed with all team members and incorporated into the IEP. This discussion can directly impact a student's post-school goals.
- Assessing students on a regular basis while on the worksite and discussing the results with the student can only help the student increase workplace readiness skills!
- The IEP team should emphasize the importance of lessons learned from the student's Project Skills experience – specific vocational strengths and needs – just as much as the academic areas of the IEP.
- We can only get better when we work on improving our areas of weakness. Before we can improve on them, we need to be informed what they are! Project Skills is a great opportunity for students to receive the feedback and support they need to be successful on a job!
- **NOTE:** Many times, Project Skills is the first work experience a student has had and things are not going to be perfect!





## Receiving Social Security Administration Disability Benefits (including supplemental security income – SSI)

Project Skills income should not impact SSI payments due to a work incentive called the Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE). If your son, daughter or family member receives Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits discuss this with the VR counselor. The VR counselor will refer you to a benefits specialist to address any concerns you may have about your social security benefits. A Benefits Specialist is someone who has been trained specifically to help individuals receiving social security disability benefits (SSI or SSDI) understand how income impacts benefits. It's important that you contact your local SSA office and inform them that your son or daughter is participating in Project Skills, a paid school work experience. Make sure that SSA knows that the wages are from a school work experience and are part of the Individual Education Plan (IEP).



### Paperwork

Be prepared to provide the following documents for VR eligibility and Project Skills:

- Copy of social security card,
- Copy of driver's license or other identification card,
- Select service form for male students over 18,
- Current medical and psychological reports (if available).

**GOOD LUCK!!**  
**Reach For Your Dreams**  
**Work Hard**  
**Take your Job Seriously**  
**HAVE FUN!**

## ► What are job coaches and what do they do?

Job coaches are individuals who specialize in assisting individuals with disabilities to adjust to the work environment while learning and accurately carry out job duties. Job coaches provide one-on-one training tailored to the needs of the employee. They may first do a job analysis to identify the job duties, followed by developing a specific plan as to how they can best train the employee to work more and more on his/her own until completely self-sufficient and able to perform job duties accurately and effectively without assistance.

Ref: <https://askjan.org/topics/jobcoaching.htm>).

Job coaches play a major role in the Project Skills program, as they will be instrumental in supporting the student and developing a training plan. They work closely with the employer in identifying specific job tasks the student will be responsible for and assist the student in learning how to accurately complete them. Job coaches assist students in adapting to the work environment and the cultural aspects of the workplace. Job coaching services vary as they are tailored to the needs of the students and are expected to fade as they become more efficient at completing job tasks, have adapted to the workplace and the employers are comfortable with the skill level of the students.



## ► What are Monitoring Services?

Monitoring services are another important role that the school provides in the Project Skills program. At a point in which the student is comfortable in the work environment and demonstrating the ability to work independently, the job coach will step back or fade from the job site. However, the job coach will continue to be available to the student and the employer while participating in the work experience. The job coach will “check-in” or monitor the student at the worksite at least two times per month depending on the needs of the student. This will allow the job coach, the student and the employer the opportunity to discuss and resolve any issues or changes regarding the job.

## ► Can students participate in Project Skills more than one year?

Yes, students may participate in Project Skills for more than one year; however, this is a decision that needs to be made by the VR counselor along with the IEP team.

**Note:** There are exceptions to the above guidance. Planning should take into account the student’s individual needs, the employer’s needs, the school’s ability to provide supports, and other factors. The VR counselor and school staff, along with the IEP team, will need to discuss what will work best for students on an individual basis. Your regional Transition Liaison can also provide guidance and assistance with answering Project Skills questions.

## ▶ Who is responsible to turn all monthly information in on time?

It is ultimately the responsibility of the school personnel to ensure all information is turned in on time. If timecards are late, then it affects when students will receive their money. However, the student should take on as much responsibility, as able, with school support.

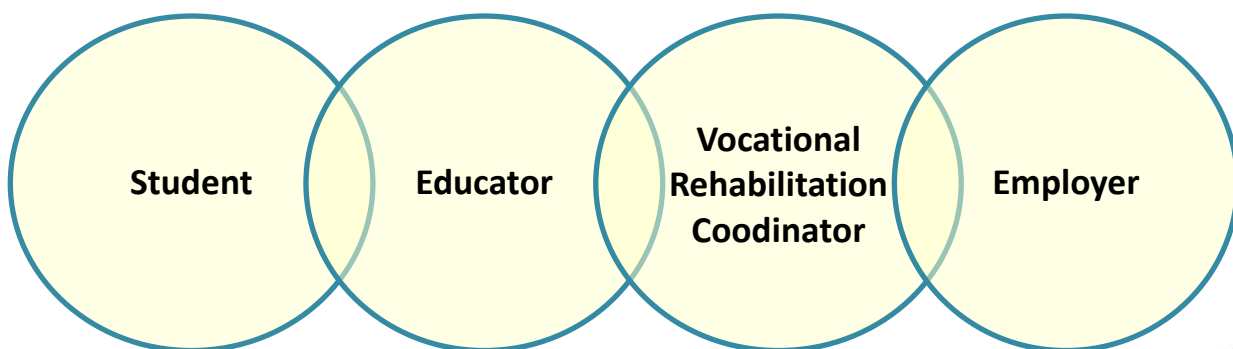
- ▶ **Where do I find all Project Skill forms, pre-employment activities, and training for job coaching?** All information will be located at Department of Human Services, Rehabilitation Services website at <http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/default.aspx>.

▶ **What happens if the student is injured on the job?**

VR provides worker's compensation insurance on all students participating in the Project Skills program. If the student is injured on the job, tell the employer, school staff, and VR counselor. A "South Dakota Employer's First Report of Injury" form must be completed and submitted within three days from the date of injury. These forms are available from the VR counselor or go to website at: <http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/default.aspx>.

All medical bills will be submitted to the VR counselor and they can forward them to the insurance company.

**Note:** Employers are required to have general liability insurance. This insurance covers general accidents that may occur on the employer's property.



## What is your VR Counselor's role?

Vocational Rehabilitation counselors have experience working with students just like you. They can help you reach your goals after high school and figure out what those goals are. This includes matching your skills, interests, and abilities to opportunities in the community. With Project Skills, they will explain the program to you and your family, and assist with getting paperwork completed and turned in so that you can get a paid work experience!

Your VR counselor will also work with you to develop and sign an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies Project Skills as a service to help you reach your goals. Project Skills ends when you are no longer on an IEP. However, you and your VR counselor will continue to work together to help you reach your future employment goals.

## A Note to Families

Please know that VR counselors acknowledge and appreciate the important role you play in your son or daughter's planning and activities towards building independence. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your VR counselor or teacher. The outcome of this program is to help your son or daughter build independence and confidence, and grow right before your eyes!



## Actions you can take to help your son or daughter succeed may include:

- Offer encouragement and support in identifying possible career and job interests.
- Help provide information about his/her strengths and interests at IEP and IPE meetings.
- Provide opportunities to budget earnings from the work experience.
- Support learning life skills that will make him/her a valuable employee.

Your support, encouragement, and participation are welcomed and valued!

In the event of a work-related injury during a Project Skills work experience, VR pays for workers' compensation insurance. Notify the VR counselor or teacher of an injury as soon as possible so the claim form can be completed and turned in.

▶ **Can I participate in Project Skills more than one year?**

- Yes, students may participate in Project Skills for more than one year; however, this is a decision that needs to be made by your VR counselor along with your IEP team.

▶ **What happens if I get injured on the job?**

- VR provides worker's compensation insurance on all participants. If you are injured on the job, tell the employer, school staff, and VR counselor. A "South Dakota Employer's First Report of Injury" form must be completed and submitted within three days from the date of injury. These forms are available from your VR counselor or go to website at: <http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/servicesandprograms.aspx>.



## Student Placement Tips for Educators

### Job placements should be individualized

- Project Skills job sites should be based on individual student preferences, interests and goals. It is highly encouraged to have one Project Skills student at one job site at a time. Continuously explore new opportunities for job sites whenever possible, rather than using the same site numerous times.



### Job Site Hours

- Project Skills work experience range from a minimum of 30 hours to a maximum of 250 hours per school year. These hours can be used on different job sites. Students can work up to 20 hours a week. The VR counselor can approve jobs above 20 hours per week but not to exceed 40 hours per week.
- Project Skills hours may be completed during the school day, after school, on weekends, or during the summer, with the assurance that the school will provide adequate supports. This flexibility allows busy students to add Project Skills to their school schedule.

### Community Job

- Project Skills is an integrated, community-based employment experience. The job site identified must be off school property. (Rare exceptions may be made based on unique situations.)
- Any job site that can help students move towards their competitive employment goals can be considered, from private to public employers, small business to large corporations, to state and federal government.  
**NOTE:** Labor laws or company policy may require that individuals be 18 years of age for some jobs.
- The Project Skills work experience cannot be at the school unless approved by the VR District Supervisor.
- The Project Skills work experience must be an individual job for the student and not a job where the employment is a group of students with disabilities.



## School Frequently Asked Questions

### ▶ Who do I ask for help?

The student's VR counselor or regional Transition Liaison will be the school Project Skills resource.

### Educator Information

### ▶ How is the match calculated?

The school employee, who provides job development, job coaching and monitoring services, will track their time and activities for each student participating in Project Skills. This information will go on the Monthly Report and used to calculate the Assurance of Match. The match is calculated by the employee's hourly wage, plus their benefits, multiplied by the hours in providing Project Skills services to the student. See example below:

| Name of Employee Provider | School District | Employee Hourly Cost plus Benefits | Hours:<br>Job Development (JD),<br>Job Coaching (JC)<br>Monitoring Services (MS) |    |    | Hourly Personnel Costs for Job Services and Supports |
|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|----|----|--|
|                           |                 |                                    | JD   | JC | MS |  |
| Ken                       | Alpena          | \$12.00                            | 3  | 6  | 0  | 9 X \$12 = \$108                                     |

### ▶ What is job development?

Job development is the process of assisting an individual in identifying and securing the ideal employment setting/workplace. It embraces the process of getting to know the individual's area of interests, work preferences and abilities and matching them with a job in the community. It also includes the process of learning about the types of jobs in the business community and working with specific employers to secure work opportunities. Job development for the Project Skills program includes:

- Identifying the interests, preferences and skill level of the student.
- Learning about potential worksites in the community that match the student preferences.
- Contacting employers for potential work site opportunities.
- Completing the Work Experience Agreement with the employer. This includes a training plan that is related to IEP goals and meets the needs of the employer.
- Getting approval from the VR counselor before the work experience begins.
- Amending the Work Experience Agreement in collaboration with the VR counselor, if there is a change in wages, agreement period, job title, or the student's job duties.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ▶ When can I work?

- It can be flexible (summer, weekends, after school, before school, during school...), and should be individualized according to your situation, interests, and resources available.
- It's important to talk about this with your team (teacher, VR counselor, and parents), and a good place to do this would be in your IEP meeting!

### ▶ How do I get paid?

- You have a choice between direct deposit or a payroll card. The payroll card is like a debit card except you can only make purchases in the amount available on the card.
- Another option may be a check mailed to you if the direct deposit and payroll card do not work for you.
- Complete time cards and turn them in on time according to the payroll calendar. If cards are not turned in on time to your local VR office, this can cause a delay in payment.
- You will get paid twice a month, around the 1<sup>st</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of the month, depending on how the calendar days fall.



### ▶ How will Project Skills affect my Social Security benefits?

- In general, earning wages may affect the Society Security (SSA) benefits a person receives. However, when participating in Project Skills, the wages a student earns are from an educational work experience and thus, should not affect any social security benefits received. SSA put several Work Incentives in place to encourage people to enter or re-enter the workforce. One of these Work Incentives is the **“Student Earned Income Exclusion”** for Individuals receiving SSI.
- You should contact your local Social Security office (SSA) and inform them you are participating in Project Skills. Inform them that the program is a work experience and part of your individualized education plan (IEP). If this sounds complicated you're not alone. You do have access to a benefits specialist that covers your area. Just ask your VR counselor to get connected.

### ▶ How will wages affect my public assistance?

- Because Project Skills wages are derived from federal training funds, public assistance programs such as SNAP, Housing, TANF, Energy Assistance, and others should not be affected. If you have concerns, contact your VR counselor or public assistance program.

### ▶ How many hours can I participate in Project Skills?

- The work experience is a minimum of 30 hours and maximum of 250 hours a student can participate in the Project Skills work experience during a school year. How these hours are used and distributed can be a team decision, often times discussed at your IEP meeting.



## Project Skills Paperwork:

**Note:** Each student should receive a Project Skills manual and forms before they begin the Project Skills work experience. The manual and all electronic forms can be found at <http://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/servicesandprograms.aspx>.

- The student's strengths and needs in the area of employment should be addressed on the present levels page of the IEP. Areas of need will be addressed on the Work Experience Agreement Form.
- **NOTE:** All required paperwork must be completed and turned into the VR office prior to the student being placed at the worksite for the first time.
- The Project Skills Work Experience Agreement form must be shared and discussed with the employer. This form states the responsibilities of the employer and the student during the work experience. It also includes the training plan which identify specific skills for the student to learn. A copy of the Work Experience Agreement form should be kept in the student's school file.
- A work schedule will be set up between the employer, school, and student. All involved parties should have a copy of the student's schedule.
- **NOTE:** Employers need to be informed who the single point of contact through the school will be. *It is the responsibility of the school to identify this single point of contact.*
- During the time the student is participating in Project Skills, the school must maintain and complete required forms.
- A monthly service report needs to be completed and submitted to the VR counselor monthly (refer to the Project Skills website).
- The Project Skills Assurance of Match form needs to be completed and submitted quarterly to Asst. Director-DRS, Hillsview Plaza, 3800 E. Highway 34, Pierre, SD 57501. (refer to the Project Skills website)
- The school contact should work with the student and employer to make sure the timecard is filled out properly, signed by student and employer, and submitted on time. **Students are paid on a bi-monthly schedule provided timecards are submitted on time.** A form with payroll dates are provided to the school and student (refer to the Project Skills website).



**Remember:** Your VR counselor or Transition Liaison will be happy to provide technical assistance on forms or any part of the Project Skills process!

# Educator Information



## ► Top Reasons Schools Should Participate in Project Skills:

- Provides a paid work experience for the student to gain career experiences
- Showcases students' employment skills and abilities to employers
- Helps build students' communication skills, confidence, self-determination and self-advocacy skills, problem-solving skills, and ability to get along with others
- Builds a work history and references
- Can improve outcomes for students with disabilities such as graduation rate, dropout rate, transition IEP compliance, and post-secondary outcomes (Indicators 1, 2, 13, and 14 of the State Performance Plan for educators)
- Connects with SD MyLife, Personal Learning Plans, and Youth Internships
- Provides transition assessment information and assists in the development of the transition component of the IEP
- Nothing beats REAL WORK for REAL PAY!

## ► Research has shown that:

- Students who had a year-round paid job for one full year during high school were 5 times more likely to be engaged in post-school employment and education.<sup>1</sup>
- Students who participate in Project Skills, have a higher engagement rate for Indicator 14 than all students combined (South Dakota Indicator 14, 2014 and 2015 results).

"Competitive integrated employment, real work for real pay in a job that aligns the post-school employment goals of the student, is the gold standard of transition outcomes for students with disabilities. This is a desired transition outcome for all youth who choose to work, regardless of disability or needed accommodations or support. Competitive integrated employment is a realistic and desirable expectation for all youth."

*"Quick Guide: Preparing Students for Competitive Integrated Employment"* by NTACTION.

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, E. W., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. A. (2012). Predictors of postschool employment outcomes for young adults with severe disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 23, 50-63. doi: 10.1177/1044207311414680

## STEPS IN THE PROJECT SKILLS PROCESS FOR SCHOOLS

### ► To Get Project Skills Started In Your School:

- Project Skills is funded through Vocational Rehabilitation, a program under the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI). Obtain information about Project Skills through your VR counselor or regional Transition Liaison. They will assist you in writing a letter of intent to participate in Project Skills. This letter should be addressed and sent to:  
Asst. Director-DRS, Hillview Plaza, 3800 E. Highway 34,  
Pierre, SD 57501.
- The School will receive a Project Skills contract that will be effective for up to two years. This contract will outline the responsibilities of VR and the school district. Your VR counselor or regional Transition Liaison will meet with you to review the contract and answer any questions you may have.
- Talk to students and parents at IEP meetings to discuss Project Skills and whether the student might benefit from this program. **NOTE:** Students must be found eligible for VR services before they can begin to participate in Project Skills.



### ► Funding:

The school district is responsible for providing non-federal matching funds for the wages paid to the student through VR. The match ratio is for every \$10.00 VR provides in paid work experience, the school will provide \$3.00 from Job Development, Job Coaching and Monitoring services during the student's work experience. These employment services/supports can be provided by a teacher, paraprofessional or other school staff. Schools may also contract with an approved VR provider. If interested in this service, the school will need to contact the VR counselor.

### ► VR Eligibility Process:

- A meeting must be scheduled to help the students decide if they want to apply for VR services. The school (or family, if agreed upon) should contact VR to schedule this appointment.
- **NOTE:** Student information should not be shared with VR counselor without prior consent from parent, guardian or student, who has reached the age of majority.
- VR will then start the eligibility paperwork process. This process may take up to 60 days, so the application could be started prior to the student turning age 16.
- After the student is found eligible, a meeting will be scheduled by the VR counselor to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) with the student.



## ► Project Skills Begins:

- When looking for a work experience for the student, ideally the job should align with the post-secondary goal identified in the IEP/IPE for the student. Identify potential employers for jobs in your community based on this information.
  - Make an appointment to meet with the employer to discuss the Project Skills program and determine their willingness to participate in the program.
  - Set up a meeting with the student and employer to discuss a potential match/job opportunity. The employer may wish to consider this a “job interview” for the student.
  - Once a match/job has been found for the student, the amount of job coaching services needed for the student must be addressed. This should not be the same number of hours for all students. Rather, it needs to be individualized for each student.
  - Job coaching can be provided by a teacher, para-professional, other school staff, or an approved VR provider outside the school. It’s important that the person providing the job coaching be knowledgeable or familiar with providing these services.
  - Regular contact to monitor student progress should be done by the school/job coach at least twice per month. (Consider at least one in-person visit at the work site each month, and additional phone calls as needed.)
- **Note:** Job Development, Job Coaching and Monitoring definitions and activities can be reviewed on pages 13 & 14 of this manual.

